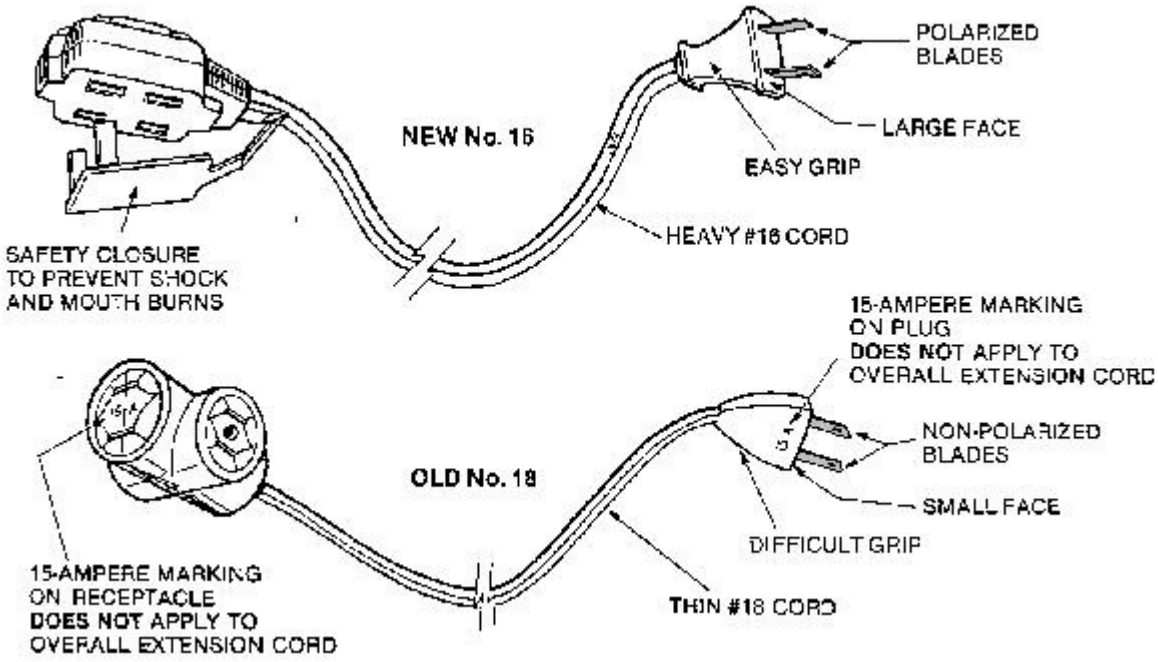
Household Extension Cords Can Cause Fires

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that about 4,700 residential fires originate in extension cords each year, killing 50 persons and injuring some 280 others.

Overheating of extension cords can occur at the plug, at the socket, or over the entire length of the cord. Hot plugs and sockets are often caused by deteriorated connections to the cord wires.



Overheating of the entire cord is usually caused by overloading (connecting appliances that need too many watts for the wire size of the cord). Many older extension cords made with small (No. 18 gauge) wire that can overheat at 15 or 20 amps are in use.

Consumers should feel the temperature of the cords when they are in use. If they are hot to the touch, disconnect the appliances).

If there is any sign of overheating, replace the extension cords with new ones having No. 16 or heavier gauge wire (the lower the gauge number, the heavier the wire and the more electrical current the cord can safely carry).

The difference between the cord sizes is not obvious, but the new No. 16 cords usually have 16 1 2 or 16 / 3 stamped on the cord and will have the wire size printed on the package.

Check new cords to make sure they are listed by a recognized national testing laboratory.